

VZCZCXRO9328
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHRB #2176 3311648
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 271648Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5270
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 2392

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 002176

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/27/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: REVISIONS TO ELECTORAL CODE INTENDED TO STRENGTHEN
ESTABLISHMENT, WEAKEN OPPOSITION

Classified by DCM Wayne Bush for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Revisions to Morocco's electoral code passed on November 23 include a new threshold political parties must cross if they wish to compete in the 2007 parliamentary elections. This threshold could exclude a half dozen, and maybe more, of Morocco's 28 political parties, but the bill also contains an easing of the requirements for petitions that candidates from new parties, or parties that did not cross the threshold, may file to be included on the ballot. The revisions to the code are clearly intended to push the smaller parties into the arms of the larger parties in the governing coalition, and thus weaken, in relative electoral terms, the position of the Islamist Justice and Development Party. The extent to which this objective is achieved will depend on the reaction of the small parties excluded by the new provisions. End summary.

¶2. (C) On the evening of November 23, the lower house of parliament approved a package of revisions to Morocco's electoral code. The bill is still subject to (almost certain) approval by the upper house and signature by the King (again almost certain) before it becomes law. The most significant of these revisions is the imposition of a three percent threshold on parties wishing to participate in the 2007 parliamentary elections. That means that only those parties that drew at least three percent of the national vote in 2002 will be eligible to field candidates. This provision threatens to exclude at least six of Morocco's 28 legally registered parties, from participation in the 2007 election. The threshold is intended to prevent "balkanization" and compel parties to consolidate into fewer, larger party blocs - an objective openly supported by the Palace.

¶3. (C) The threshold was fiercely opposed by leaders of small left parties, such as Mohammed Moujahid of the Socialist Unity Party, who dubbed the electoral code "the exclusion law," and organized a small demonstration in front of parliament on November 10. The Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) also actively opposed the threshold - even though it is comfortably above it. Observers from across the spectrum agree that the revisions are intended to work in favor of the ruling coalition led by the socialist USFP and against the opposition, whether leftist or Islamist. In this calculus, marginal left parties will be compelled to either join forces with the USFP or other large parties in the coalition, or else remain outside electoral politics. The Islamist establishment, already united under the PJD umbrella, would then become weaker in relative terms.

¶4. (SBU) The impact of the new three percent threshold is partially offset by a compromise modification to the required qualifications for new parties or parties that did not cross the three percent threshold in 2002. In the bill passed on November 23, candidates from either category may run for a parliamentary seat if they submit a petition containing 100

signatures of registered voters in the constituency they propose to compete in. Eliminated from the final draft was the requirement that 20 of these 100 signatures come from members of the "grand electorat" (elected officials at either the local, provincial, or national level). The elimination of this requirement significantly lowers, but does not eliminate, the bar for candidates from new parties or parties that fail to cross the three percent threshold.

¶6. (SBU) In addition, the bill passed on November 23 reduced from seven to six percent the threshold imposed on parties to have votes counted in the "ballotage" - the apportionment of seats in the next parliament by proportion of the total number of votes obtained by different party lists. Parliamentary contacts and Moroccan political observers told us they doubted this change would have a major impact on the composition of the legislature.

¶7. (C) Comment: Whether the revisions actually promote the consolidation of parties and the overall stability of the political process will depend on the reaction of the smaller, mainly left-leaning groups that cannot cross the three percent threshold. If they mend fences and join forces with the parties in the governing coalition, this objective will be achieved. However, if they remain on the margins, it is possible that alienated supporters could defect to the ranks of the Islamists, if only in protest. End comment.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

Riley